

# ALASKA AND ITS POSSIBILITIES

by K. L. Smith



Dutch Harbor and Unalakleet in the Extreme North

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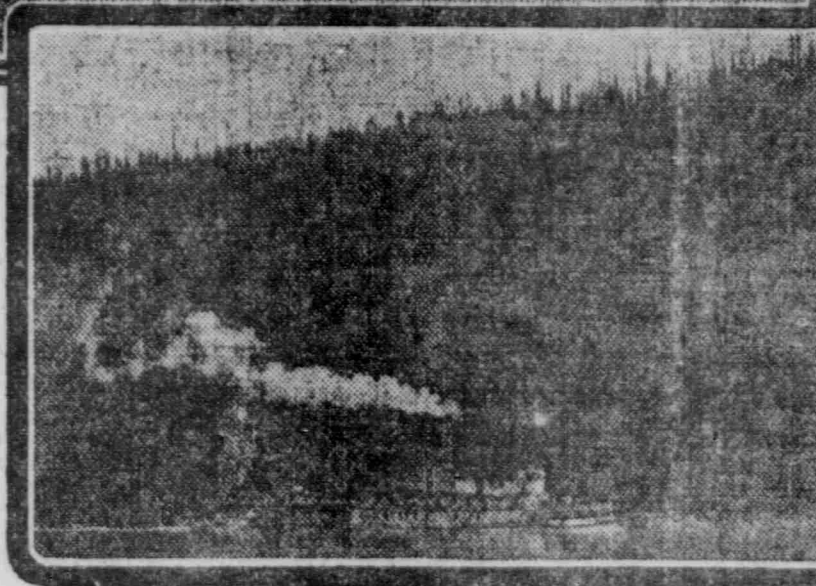
THIS December a bill will be presented to Congress to make Alaska a state. It may surprise many people that Alaska has aspirations in this direction, but for some time this country has been dissatisfied with its form of government, and felt it did not have proper representation at Washington. If it succeeds and another star is added to the flag, the United States will create a state out of a territory that has 66,000 inhabitants, with a trade with the United States amounting to over a thousand dollars per annum for every white man, woman and child.

Most people think of Alaska as a cold, repellent country, with some rich gold mines, which are worked under great difficulty. As a matter of fact, the country covers such a wide area it has many climates, but its general aspect may be likened to that of Norway or Sweden. On the coast there are places where the thermometer never goes below zero in winter. There are other sections in the interior on the northwest coast where it is extremely cold in winter, but the summers, throughout are delightful. Though this season is short, the sun shines for so many

hours a day that vegetation grows rapidly.

Those who associate this country merely with its gold fields know little of its resources. It exported last year nearly \$600,000 worth of fish—salmon and other kinds—dried, canned and salted. It has furs, gypsum, marble, tin and supplies the world far more than Hawaii or Porto Rico. All this and its resources have not begun to be developed. Persons who do not know Alaska think of it as a faraway country, at which vessels touch occasionally. In reality, both American and Canadian boats carry on regular service with the country. There are over thirty American vessels that call at Alaskan ports and foreign vessels frequently stop there. Last year nearly 800 vessels cleared from Alaskan coast towns.

But there is a vast interior that needs reader means of communication with the coast than these vessels. Alaska needs two things imperatively to further commercial interests and to make the country better known. These are railroads, good wagon roads and trails. With these development will increase with leaps and bounds. At present there are only a few hundred miles of railroad



A Yukon River Scene



Church built by Indians at Metlakatla

besides the White Pass & Yukon, which runs from Skagway into the interior and is financed by Canadian and English capital. There are short stretches that have been constructed to facilitate shipments from mines, but the need of complete railroad systems is yearly becoming more apparent. Every governor that has been in Alaska has said that proper transportation facilities were one of the country's problems, this in spite of the fact that there are tremendous and wonderful waterways.

The Yukon, which is extensively used for transportation, is over 3,500 miles long and navigable for 2,000 miles. This immense river is seventy miles wide at its shallow mouth. Other streams are navigable for from 300 to 1,000 miles, but these do not fill the need of railroads and trails. There are few good wagon roads, a marked contrast to the Canadian side, where roads were built as soon as paying gold was discovered in any place. Alaska is calling loud for these things for her people and protesting that

people with money to back them get what the average citizen does not. Those that know say there is 18,000 miles of dredging ground in Alaska and great fields of anthracite and other coal. As for agriculture, though the season for crops is short, the many hours of sunshine each day make fair returns. Hay, potatoes, Melons, squash, tomatoes, sweet corn are raised, while cranberries, strawberries and other fruits grow wild in certain parts, where the climate is modified by the Japan current.

This wonderful region, large as all the United States east of the Mississippi and north of Alabama, Georgia and North Carolina, has vast stretches of cedar, pine and other forests, all waiting for the ax. There are elk, deer, moose and caribou and beautiful white mountain goats on the majestic mountains. The Indians have long held Mount McKinley sacred and call it the "Home of the Great Chief." But this is only one of a group like Mount St. Elias and Mount Fairweather, all averaging over 15,000 feet. The white goats can be seen on these mountains in bands of a dozen or more, and thousands of caribou are in the valleys. It is to be hoped they will remain undisturbed. When this country was purchased Secretary Seward was laughed at and derided, but now people are gradually comprehending that the Seal Islands alone have turned into our revenue more than the sum paid to Russia for the entire country.

At the time of this purchase the immense valley of the Yukon, which empties thirteen times more water than the Mississippi and is in some places twenty miles wide, was inhabited by "Men of the Yukon" tribe of Indians. Today it is peopled by brave pioneers, who are building towns and settling valleys. They have started many cities, large and small, as the direct result of the working of mines. The Alaskan waterways are used extensively in summer for passenger and freight service, and provisions are shipped not alone for the short summer but for the longer winter also. It is probable these waterways will never be abandoned, but railroads will help in reaching places not touched by the big rivers and their tributaries.

Dawson proudly calls itself the metropolis of the Upper Yukon, and it is a stirring town, but its population has decreased since the surrounding mines have been worked out. Fairbanks is the large town of the middle valley. It is surprisingly cosmopolitan, has nearly 4,000 people, three banks, hotels, a three-story office building, three churches, two newspapers, hospital, telephones, electric lights and many comforts. Nome is larger than either of these towns. Its population is about 10,000. It is on Bering sea and more easy of access, and from 1900 has held its own as a sort of capital of the coast of Alaska. The entire population of Alaska is composed of whites, natives, Chinese, Japanese and a few negroes. The whites predominate and rule, and are scattered along the coast to the interior. What an immense district lies ready for occupancy can be realized when it is known it is 2,000 miles from Skagway on the coast to the Yukon gold field, and that it takes twelve days to go from Seattle to Nome by steamer. The Yukon country is reached by boat from Seattle to Skagway, thence by rail where was once a wagon road, and over passes where many a prospector in the early days lost his pack and horses. From the railroad station at White Horse a steamer connects with the Yukon river, and a good share of this journey is along a coast and through a country whose scenic grandeur is incomparable in a combination of ocean, snow-capped mountains and stupendous walled channels.

The real truth is that Alaska is an empire, and it wants a larger population. If it were boomed half as much as Alberta, Saskatchewan and other Canadian provinces it would have one. The farmers from the states who are going to those districts never think of going to Alaska, partly because its resources have not been called to their attention. Every American citizen should know the truth about Alaska and stop thinking of it as a barren, inaccessible country. It is true it is our last frontier, that the summers are short and the winters are cold, but it is a coldness that is considered wonderful in its health-giving properties. There is one hot springs with a hotel built of

logs and a natatorium that cost \$250,000. Eleven million dollars' worth of gold was shipped out of Fairbanks in one year, in spite of a strike, and almost as much was shipped out of Nome. The people of the states have only a hint of the possibilities. There is not the slightest doubt but the country can support an immense population, and if it once becomes a state it will be better known. Its far-away aspect will sink into the background, and its immensity become better understood. As an instance of this last, the island of Attu, which belongs to Alaska, is as far from the coast as San Francisco is from Maine. This makes, as some senators jokingly said, San Francisco the middle town of the United States.

The real Alaska is a land of constant marvels, contradictions and surprises. It cost us not a fraction of what the salmon fisheries alone are worth, and one mine has more than earned enough to compensate the outlay. It is a vast storehouse of undeveloped products, and it is getting more and more into communication with the United States. The first two successful wireless stations in the world were the St. Michaels and Port Safety stations. Now, there are wireless stations at St. Michaels, Tanana, Fairbanks, Circle City, Eagle, Cordova and Sitka. These keep Alaska in touch with the world and supply news for daily papers.

In the words of an Alaskan enthu-

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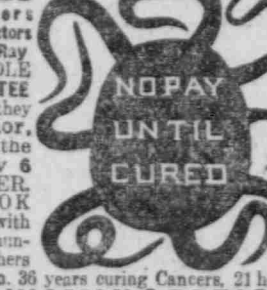
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